DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 057 PS 024 332

TITLE	West Virginia Early Childhood Transition Initiative: Operation Tadpole. 1995 Report.
INSTITUTION	West Virginia State Dept. of Education, Charleston. Office of Special Education Programs and Assurances.
PUB DATE	Jul 95
NOTE	17p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Developmental Continuity; Early Intervention; Integrated Services; Preschool Education; Program Descriptions; Program Evaluation; *Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS	Concerns Based Adoption Model; West Virginia

ABSTRACT

The West Virginia Early Childhood Transition Initiative is an interagency systems change effort started in 1993 to develop a seamless system of service for children, ages birth to 5 years. The initiative's training and technical assistance component is known as Operation Tadpole. A state level steering committee coordinates the initiative on an interagency basis. The intended impact of the initiative is to have maximum positive child outcomes through effective early childhood programs that are compatible as the child moves from one to another; positive ongoing relationships among families and professionals; and an effective transition process for children, families, and involved agencies. Interactive training was held in 1994 and 1995 for county and community teams to help them identify strategies that would work in their communities. The process, outcomes, and impact of the transition initiative is being monitored through a multi-year evaluation plan based on the Concerns-Based Adoption Model. Operation Tadpole has had the following outcomes thus far: (1) development of interagency agreements reflecting awareness of need for collaboration; (2) increased use of transition activities; (3) increased compliance with federal and state transition regulations; (4) collaborative training of agency personnel and families; (5) increased interagency childfind activities; (6) pooled resources for childfind and interagency activities; (7) re-evaluation of priority entry criteria to meet identified service gaps; and (8) increased family involvement in transition. (KDFB)

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West Virginia Early Childhood Transition Initiative

ED 407 057

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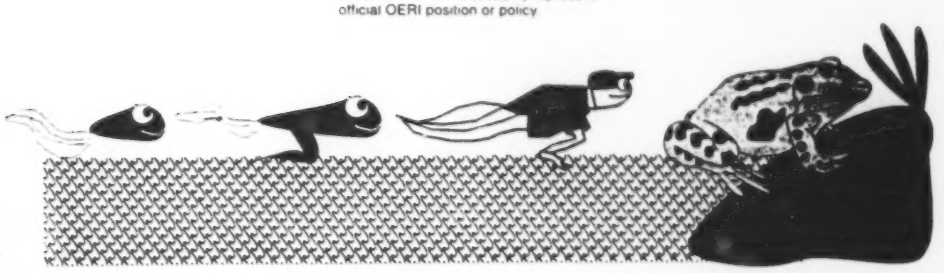

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OPERATION TADPOLE

1995 Report

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July 14, 1995

I am pleased to provide the West Virginia Early Childhood Transition Initiative Report 1995 as part of our state's early childhood initiative. During my tenure as Governor, I have made the reform of services to children and families a priority. The West Virginia Departments of Education and Health and Human Resources collaborated with Head Start, the Governor's Cabinet on Children and Families, and other agencies serving young children to provide this report. It describes the West Virginia interagency systems change effort to develop a "seamless system of service" for children, ages birth to five years. In addition, the document highlights the design and implementation of the initiative's training and technical assistance component, known as OPERATION TADPOLE.

The West Virginia Early Childhood Transition Initiative Steering Committee received an INSPIRE Award from my office in May 1995 because of its interagency team approach to improving services to children and families while reducing overall government expenditures. The committee is continuing its efforts to improve services for our state's infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. The expanded scope of the initiative includes developing stronger linkages with community preschool and day care programs through the provision of comprehensive training and technical assistance in serving children with and without disabilities. The continued emphasis on interagency collaboration in the development of programs remains a major tenant of the initiative and will keep West Virginia at the forefront of early childhood education and care.

Sincerely,

Gaston Caperton

Gaston Caperton
Governor

A local team "presenting" at one of the regional TADPOLE trainings.

Introduction

The West Virginia Early Childhood Initiative was launched in the summer of 1993 through joint efforts of the West Virginia Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs and Assurances and the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health, Office of Maternal and Child Health, Part H Early Intervention Program. West Virginia needed a statewide process for providing community supports which addressed the transition of young children (birth through 5 years) and their families from one program or agency to another. Common transition points for children and families include entrance to and exit from Part H early intervention services, Head Start, public and private preschool and child care services, and public school primary programs.

Members of the training team at Canaan Valley Resort.

A process was necessary that would address the needs of all children and families related to transitions (regardless of program, income or ability level). The process also needed to adhere to legal mandates for the transition of children with disabilities and their families found in federal requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Parts H and B) and Head Start Performance Standards. Once the early childhood transition process was established on a statewide basis, local community agency representatives and family members would then need training, technical assistance and ongoing support that would be relevant to the unique strengths and needs of each community.

A state level steering committee was established to coordinate this initiative on an interagency basis and to develop a systems change plan to respond to local needs. The steering committee included representation from the WV Department of Education, Office of Maternal and Child Health Part H Early Intervention Program, Head Start, Child Care, families, the Governor's Cabinet on Children and Families, the Office of Behavioral Health Chapter 1 Program, the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, and the Interagency Coordinating Council for Part H. A technical assistance specialist from the Mid-South Regional Resource Center facilitated the steering committee meetings and provided resources for use and adaptation.

Collaboration in progress!

Local Stakeholder Involvement in the Planning Process

During the initial planning stages of the initiative, it became apparent to the steering committee members, that information regarding current transition practices was needed from parents of young children and from professionals who provide services to the 0-5 population. A short survey was designed to elicit the following information: a) current transition practices, b) issues and concerns regarding transition, and c) suggestions for state-level assistance in transition planning. During October and November of 1993, the survey was conducted at the state meetings of the following groups: Special Education Administrators, the West Virginia Early Intervention Interagency Coordinating Council, the Parent/Educator Resource Centers, and Head Start Directors.

In January of 1994, the steering committee also held a local stakeholders meeting comprised of family members and individuals from school districts, early intervention programs, child care programs and Head Start. This stakeholder group developed recommendations which shaped the direction of the initiative.

Intended Impact of the Initiative for Children and Families

Based on the results of the stakeholder meeting, the following outcomes were identified:

- maximum positive outcomes for the child through effective early childhood programs that are compatible as the child moves from one program to another.
- positive ongoing relationships among families and professionals of participating agencies.
- an effective transition process for children, families and involved agencies.

Using information from local communities, the steering committee designed and is implementing a statewide system of training and technical assistance targeted at producing these results. This systems change project is known as OPERATION TADPOLE.

OPERATION TADPOLE

The West Virginia Early Childhood Transition Initiative's OPERATION TADPOLE is one of the few, if not the only, statewide transition project in the nation addressing services and programs for all children. Specifically, OPERATION TADPOLE:

- Provides a comprehensive state-wide training process that includes resources and technical support to determine the design of the project for each county.

Governor's INSPIRE Award

In May 1995, the West Virginia Early Childhood Transition Steering Committee received an INSPIRE Award from Governor Gaston Caperton. INSPIRE Awards are given to state agency personnel who design innovative programs or procedures which promote efficiency in government. OPERATION TADPOLE met the criteria for the award through the interagency design of the project which promotes collaboration among local agencies in the provision of early childhood services through shared responsibility and resources.

"I really liked the chance to meet with providers from other agencies to get to know each other, share information and collaborate on strategies. There has never been an opportunity for this before. Good job! Very productive three days!"

- Requires a cooperative process among all agencies and organizations providing services to the 0-5 population, and calls on them to work toward a collaborative venture.

- Requests active participation of parents and families who have the primary responsibility of the child.

- Asks agencies representing child care, education, health and the community, along with parent and/or families, to enter into a partnership to provide a continuity of services collaboratively for children and families.

In the Fall of 1994, statewide transition training was provided through five (5) two and one half (2.5) day regional workshops. Fifty-three county teams were trained during these sessions and the two remaining counties received training in early 1995. The community teams were comprised of representatives of local school districts, Part H early intervention programs, Head Start programs, families, the child care system, as well as other community members. Approximately 600 individuals were trained by interagency collaborative teams. The training content focused on local community collaboration strategies, effective early childhood practices, and a transition framework adapted from the Regional Educational Laboratories Early Childhood Collaboration Networks' document entitled "Continuity in Early Childhood: A Framework for Home, School, and Community Linkages".

The agenda for the training was designed to be interactive, informative, and targeted at helping local communities develop strategies that would work for them. Principles of adult learning and the experiences of veteran early childhood trainers guided the development of the training activities, many of which required team participation, cooperation, and creativity. Activities which required concentration, such as a side-by-side comparison of federal regulations, were interspersed with interactive team discussions such as environmental scans and action planning. Each participant was provided with a manual containing regulations, best practice information, forms for action planning, and the transition framework.

Trainers were provided trainers' manual, including a script for all activities and the resources necessary for facilitation of the county teams.

Each county team completed a "self-assessment" detailing current practices; an action plan, including priority activities and next steps for collaboration; and a team survey, identifying additional training and technical assistance needs. Each team was assisted at the training by a facilitator, an individual available as a resource following the training or as a linkage to follow-up support.

Evaluation of the Initiative

The process, outcomes, and impact of the transition initiative on the development of a seamless system of transition is being monitored through a multi-year evaluation plan designed and implemented by personnel from the Appalachia Educational Laboratory. This comprehensive plan is based primarily on the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), a theoretical framework used for the study of individuals and groups involved in change. The CBAM evaluation process assists the steering committee in identifying the concerns of community teams so that these concerns can be addressed on an on-going basis.

A local team designing a lily pad representing the community.

The CBAM uses a Stages of Concern Questionnaire, an instrument which measures the participant's level of concern regarding an innovation, in this case, the transition initiative. This instrument was administered to all participants of the OPERATION TADPOLE training. Since the initiative is in its initial stages, the participants' levels of concern were predictably high regarding their abilities to execute tasks and also about collaboration. The Stages of Concern Questionnaire will be readministered periodically over the next three years to determine the attitudinal changes of the community team members toward the transition initiative at various stages of implementation.

The five trainings were also evaluated using a usefulness/ satisfaction survey. Each activity of the training was evaluated separately. In addition, overall content and activity design were evaluated. The results of these surveys were overwhelmingly positive with regard to content, presentation, and trainer responsiveness.

MSRRC Role in the West Virginia Early Childhood Transition Initiative

Technical assistance has been provided on an ongoing basis since this initiative began in 1993 by the Mid-South Regional Resource Center (MSRRC), a federally funded technical assistance center based at the University of Kentucky. The MSRRC serves the states of Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina , South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C. MSRRC staff has facilitated the meetings of initiative steering committee through out the planning, implementation and evaluation of this initiative. This committee meets in day long meetings approximately every 6 to 8 weeks. Technical assistance has also included supplying the Steering Committee with a variety of research, training and technical assistance resources on the topic of early childhood transition. MSRRC staff served as an observer/evaluator at the first of five regional OPERATION TADPOLE workshops. Finally, future plans for MSRRC involvement include facilitator training for steering committee members, assistance in design of facilitator training for other TADPOLE trainers and local team leaders, and ongoing facilitation of the steering committee as its workscope evolves in keeping with the evolution of the initiative.

Impact of OPERATION TADPOLE at the Local Level

Through the on-going contact among steering committee members, team facilitators and the local team members, the following outcomes of OPERATION TADPOLE have been reported:

- The development of interagency agreements that reflect a greater awareness of the need for collaboration regarding referral procedures, timelines, and the sharing of services.
- An increased use of transition activities such as cross-program visits and transition summer programs.
- Increased compliance with federal and state regulations regarding transition.
- Collaborative training of agency personnel and families.
- Interagency childfind activities in counties where limited communication among agencies had previously existed.
- Pooled resources for childfind and interagency activities.
- Re-evaluation of priority entry criteria to meet identified gaps in services.
- Increased involvement of family members in the transition process.

Big Dawg and friend helping out at the Raleigh County Kiddie Fair.

Future Plans for the Transition Initiative Steering Committee

A "TADPOLE" Performance!

The Steering Committee, in conjunction with the combined Part H and Part B Preschool Comprehensive System of Personnel Development, (CSPD) has developed these activities as follow up to the initial OPERATION TADPOLE training:

- The Part H and Part B applications for state and federal funding will now include a narrative about the preschool transition process in each county which will produce information to facilitate the monitoring of the transition process.

- An ongoing evaluation process for the transition initiative has been developed to determine its effectiveness and the ongoing training and technical assistance needs throughout the state.

- Upon request, facilitation and technical assistance for individual early childhood community collaboration teams is provided to assist in the development of the team and local implementation of the Transition Framework.

- A newsletter and technical assistance "alert" system will be developed to encourage sharing and networking among the OPERATION TADPOLE early childhood community collaboration teams by the Fall of 1995.

- In response to the needs surveys at the OPERATION TADPOLE trainings, specific technical assistance modules are being developed for team-building, interagency agreements, child find, and empowerment of families.

- Facilitation teams have been assigned to each of the twenty-three counties which requested team building training; and it is anticipated that all will have received the training by July of 1995.

- In the Fall of 1995, there will be trainings which are designed as one year follow- ups to the initial OPERATION TADPOLE training.

- The Part H and Part B Preschool S.T.E.P.S. Training Calendar, which is part of the combined CSPD efforts, includes OPERATION TADPOLE identified training needs as well as those of the Part H and Part B preschool personnel. All OPERATION TADPOLE participants have access to these training opportunities. There are over 90 trainings scheduled for the calendar year 1995.

- An Orientation Module for Early Childhood Paraprofessionals is being developed and will be disseminated as part of a pilot project to determine the practical application of the contents for increasing the use of effective early childhood practices.

"At surface level, many activities seemed a silly waste of time. Deeper assessment.... team spirit was accomplished, barriers were broken, friendship partnerships were established. A working relationship was developed"

"So wonderful–talking to community providers and parents! What a county! We are energized!"

"I really liked the information on help available to parents... it came through clearly — making me more aware of our children's rights and where to go for needed help—family empowerment was stressed effectively."

" I really liked gaining an understanding of how various agencies serve children and how to connect with them."

"This training was excellent in helping me to see what our goals should be in the immediate future. I thoroughly enjoyed it."

- The training calendar for 1996 will be a combined effort between Part H Early Intervention, Part B Preschool, the state Day Care Program, Head Start Programs, West Virginia Association for Young Children, the West Virginia University Fundamentals Program, and the University Affiliated Center for Developmental Disabilities.

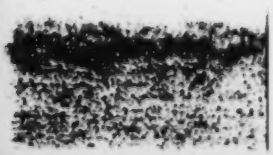
In response to the overwhelming identified need for increased availability of effective early childhood programs for children from birth through five, the West Virginia Early Childhood Transition Initiative Steering Committee has prioritized the development and implementation of a comprehensive, interagency training and technical assistance system as the next steps for this initiative. The system will consist of ongoing training needs identification, evaluation, and monitoring of the effectiveness of these efforts to shape the supports which will be available to the early childhood community. In addition, the steering committee will focus on:

- monitoring and, as needed, providing input on follow-up training and technical assistance for OPERATION TADPOLE;

- designing and piloting a collaborative process for monitoring and evaluating adherence to early childhood transition compliance issues and effective practices;

- development of strategies for greater involvement of the child care community in this early childhood transition initiative; and

- development of recommendations to increase the use of effective early childhood practice in public schools.



Coming together is a
BEGINNING;

Staying together is
PROGRESS;

Working together is
SUCCESS.

- Henry Ford

OPERATION TADPOLE activities are funded jointly by the West Virginia Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs and Assurances and the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Public Health, Office of Maternal and Child Health Part H Early Intervention Program in conjunction with the West Virginia Early Intervention Interagency Coordinating Council and the University Affiliated Center for Developmental Disabilities.

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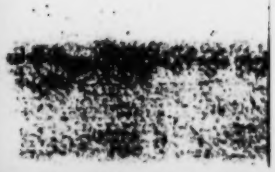

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